

Corps of Engineers Helps Fort Benning Face Military Construction Challenges

By: Sarah McCleary

A flood of Soldiers relocating to Fort Benning is driving the demand for new facilities on and off the installation. Forming the second largest military installation in the United States Army, the Armor School, out of Fort Knox, Ky., is moving to Fort Benning as part of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) program. Fort Benning will no longer be known as the *Home of the Infantry*, but as the *Home of the Armored Infantry*, and a 'Maneuver Center of Excellence'.

"The combination of these two schools will create the largest training installation in the United States Army," said Col. Mark Held, Savannah District commander, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. "But the addition of 14,000 Soldiers and their families means an increased demand for facilities on the installation and ultimately a major test for engineers."

Responsible for 18 installations in the Southern United States, Savannah District has a \$4 billion budget to use for master planning, design, and construction. "With \$400 million already under contract this year and \$2.1 billion to spend over the next five years, the construction budget for Benning exceeds all other Army installations in our District," said Colonel Held.

The Corps is already working on a consolidated health clinic, shoot houses, a combined arms collective training facility, a digital multi-purpose range complex, an infantry platoon battle course, and a barracks complex with 35 more projects expected in the next two years. The increase in the Corps' program at Fort Benning is one example of Military Construction (MILCON) transformation as it converts Fort Benning to a 21st

century state-of-the-art training facility. “The sheer volume and magnitude of the Corps’ workload will make Fort Benning and the West Georgia area a premier destination for contractors and suppliers in the Southeast,” said George Condoyiannis, area engineer at Fort Benning.

It all adds up to a challenge for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District. “The Corps has engaged in MILCON transformation in order to meet the needs of our normal military construction program and the ever increasing workload attributed to BRAC over the next five years,” said Colonel Held. “And no area will grow as quickly as Fort Benning.” The Corps is committed to improving their business processes to ensure its installations meet the needs of the Army in the future. “We are doing that by standardizing facilities and decreasing construction timelines while gaining momentum and value through regional strategies and continuous build,” said Colonel Held.

First, the Corps refined the acquisition process, using the MILCON bid Transformation Request for Proposal (MT RFP) system to obtain proposals. Performance oriented criteria for the project is given to potential contractors, rather than prescriptive requirements from the Corps design team. This allows competing contractors to give the Corps their best value for a project. “The Corps of Engineers has gotten away from sealed bid proposals in favor of MT RFP that lets industry tell us how to do it better and lets us adopt their best business practices,” said Colonel Held. “The new process helps us cut costs and build facilities faster while maintaining quality.”

Of course, the number of Soldiers moving in requires the infrastructure surrounding Fort Benning to grow as well, and this could be a real test for MT RFP. “Although our system is better and faster, the pool of available contractors and skilled labor will be a

challenge due to other commitments in the area,” said Colonel Held. Fort Benning is located on the I-85 corridor and is already seeing rapid growth, as witnessed by the recent ground-breaking ceremony for a new Kia automobile manufacturing plant just 25 miles north of Fort Benning. The increase in Soldiers and their families will create a need for housing, schools, churches and big-box stores off-post as well. This will cause all of those industries to compete for resources. In order to meet this growing demand and attract construction resources for the road ahead, the Corps is fostering an environment of partnership and mutual trust with their contractors at Fort Benning, according to Condoyiannis.

In addition, the Corps is answering the call for quick construction by using industry standards for building and not limiting the type of construction traditionally used on military installations. The strict specifications and codes which previously bound the Corps of Engineers, no longer apply. “Industry is helping us meet these challenges and the needs of the Soldiers who will use our facilities,” said Colonel Held. “We are engaging the Armor Center and the Infantry Center to tell us how to incorporate their best ideas into our designs and construction as well.”

As it moves into the bulk of the five-year BRAC construction cycle, the Corps of Engineers will migrate from MT RFP into Centers of Standardization in order to gain lessons-learned and efficiencies from continuous build principles. Eight centers of standardization will be responsible for the development and execution of certain facilities. Savannah District has the lead and is actively engaged in six standard designs, according to Colonel Held. Savannah standardizes Command and Control Facilities for Division and Corps Headquarters, Brigade Headquarters, Battalion Headquarters,

Company Operations Facilities, Tactical Equipment Maintenance Facilities, and Brigade Operations Complexes. By continuously building these facilities using standard designs, the process is refined, effectively lowering expense and time spent on each project.

These new practices by the Corps of Engineers build on its approach to military construction. “The changes will significantly alter the way we conduct business,” said Condoyiannis.

Of the 35 projects planned in the next two years, four are much-needed barracks complexes for Soldiers moving on post. Several training complexes, Soldier support centers, and headquarters facilities are also among the ambitious list of projects. “There is no greater challenge for Savannah District than to ensure the ‘Maneuver Center of Excellence’ provides Soldiers today and tomorrow with the finest facilities in the world,” said Colonel Held. “And that is our number one priority.”